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Upper Intermediate Student’s Book

Life

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It’s known that animals often co-operate in their own social groups, helping each other to hunt or raise their young. Some highly intelligent animals, like elephants, go even further than this, and help other animals who are not in their own family group. But co-operation between animals of different species is unusual, so that’s why the story of Suriya, the orang-utan, has attracted a lot of interest.

Suriya lives with his keepers at The Institute of Greatly Endangered and Rare Species in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, which is a kind of sanctuary for rare animals. Recently this orang-utan has made an unlikely friend in a local hound dog. Now most dogs avoid apes, because they are scared of them basically, but these two have formed a strong bond. Each day the dog comes into the compound and searches out Suriya.

When he finds him, they carry on like long lost friends, wrestling and hugging and playing together. They’ve been doing this every day since they first met and their friendship has attracted the curiosity of millions of viewers on the *National Geographic Channel*. The founder of the institute, Dr Antle explains: ‘It’s clear they are having the time of their life. What is more striking is that Suriya has also understood that the hound dog is very hungry and so he regularly shares his monkey biscuits with him. Orang-utans are very generous creatures. If you give one a piece of candy, often they will break it in half and hand one piece back to you.’

So how does he explain the fact that their relationship has a lot of the characteristics of what we call ‘friendship’? Antle says that the two animals are fulfilling a basic social need in each other that perhaps we don’t normally associate with animals. ‘It’s a relationship with attributes of fun and interaction that they are not getting from anyone else’.